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## Iranscam's Pontius Pilates

Robert C. McFarlane, the former national security adviser, went to the nub of the matter in his opening statement at the congressional hearings on Monday. It is hard to improve on his indictment of the fundamental flaw in the administration's approach both to arms dealings with Iran and to secret support of the Contras in Central America. As he said, having stressed that he and the president felt strongly that defeat of Soviet ambitions in

secret in ways they could not act in public.

It was and is profoundly anti-democratic, but the ease with which it was all accomplished and the administration's sustained ability to keep it hidden from the American people reveal how dangerously far we have moved from the requirement of political accountability. The apparatus of the national security state was fully utilized to support policies the democratic polity had not endorsed—and not a single administration official who knew what was happening had the decency and moral courage to stand up in public and oppose it. Not anyone in the National Security Council, not the vice president, not the secretary of state, not the secretary of defense, not a clutch of assistant secretaries and their minions and most definitely not the late CIA director, William Casey.

Some, like Mr. Casey and his agency, were ardent supporters and in it up to their eyeballs. Some, like Secretary of State George Shultz, were actively involved in part of it and opposed to part. But all either kept quiet or encouraged their subordinates in embassies and military bases around the world to go along. Pontius Pilate or active conspirator, none measured up to his responsibility to the nation.

Watching both Gen. Secord and Mr. McFarlane, I was reminded of the old West Point motto of "Duty, Honor, Country." It is a creed worth emblazoning on every mantle, so long as it is properly understood. But "country" is not synonymous with either president or government. "Duty" properly defined is not to orders from the chain of command but to the imperatives of constitutional government. And "honor" lies in measuring up to a moral code larger than current policy.

Gen. Secord, speaking of his co-conspirators in the grand game of aid-the-Contras, Lt. Col. Oliver North and Vice Adm. John Poindexter, said, "They are both dedicated and honest men who in my view tried diligently and conscientiously to carry out the

policies of the president in an appropriate manner." And so they must all have seemed to each other, living in that closed world of certitude in which their patriotism and their leader's sensible policies seem unfairly hemmed in by the restrictions and harassment of Congress, press and public. They would not and could not accept the constitutional truth expressed by Sen. Daniel Inouye that "the president may be the senior partner in foreign policy, but he is not the sole proprietor."

It was somehow appropriate that Gary Hart's self-destruction coincided with Gen. Secord's testimony. Both men believe themselves to be people whose devotion to the nation's future is above reproach. Both believe that they have been unfairly persecuted for reasons that are irrelevant to the larger issues with which they were engaged. Both are incapable of admitting that there was anything fundamentally wrong with what they did in secret, since their public motives were, by their own lights, so pure.

But in the case of both Gary Hart and Richard Secord (and all those who were engaged in one aspect or another of the larger "enterprise" to which Gen. Secord was attached), what was conducted "off the books" went off the tracks as well. "Out of sight and out of control" could well be the epitaph for both. But what was no more than personal self-destruction for Mr. Hart, sad as that was, has far more dangerous implications for the nation in the case of the president and his loyal men. It is not just "folly and hypocrisy," as Sen. William Cohen termed the Iranian arms deal. It is a radical assault on the underlying principles of this democratic republic, none more important than the stricture that government cannot do behind closed doors what the people would not approve when they are open.

*Mr. Carter is a political commentator who heads a television production firm.*

### Viewpoint

By Hodding Carter III

Nicaragua was essential in order to deter Soviet designs elsewhere in the world:

"We had to win this one. And this is where the administration made its first mistake. For if we had such a large strategic stake, it was clearly unwise to rely on covert activity as the core of our policy. . . . You must have the American people and the U.S. Congress solidly behind you. Yet it is virtually impossible, almost as a matter of definition, to rally public support behind a policy that you can't even talk about."

And there you have it. The president and his men, from buccaneer patriots like retired Maj. Gen. Richard Secord to stolid veterans of the national security apparatus like Bud McFarlane, simply ignored the fact that they live in a nation in which the informed consent of the governed is the presumed first requirement of public policy. All else flowed from that: the lies, the law-breaking, the Swiss bank accounts, the privateer warriors, the privatization of foreign policy, the destruction of presidential prestige. Having been unable to "rally public support" behind one policy—aid to the Contras—and having pledged never to pursue another—aid to terrorists—the president and his men proceeded to act in